

“Contentment: The Lost Virtue” *“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”* 1 Timothy 6: 6

In our Epistle lesson, Saint Paul is writing to a young pastor named Timothy, and near the end of his letter, the topic turns to money—specifically, those who think godliness is a means to financial gain. In direct opposition to such a mindset, Paul writes that “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.” So writes the Apostle Paul.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” Paul holds up contentment as a key value for us to live by. God would like for us to be happy with what we have and to enjoy the blessings we’ve been given. But are we happy—do we enjoy our blessings—or is there something always pulling towards more, more, more?

Part of the problem is that contentment is counter-cultural. Have you ever heard an advertisement or a sales pitch that begins by saying, “You know what? What you have right now is OK. You don’t really need anything else”? Of course not! We are always being trained trained to want more and human nature happily complies.

In today’s Old Testament lesson, Amos was warning Israel, but listen to this; he said: “You lie on beds...and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.” God is crying out through Amos, “Do you realize that you are teetering on the edge of spiritual ruin? Or are you too busy eating, shopping, and entertaining yourself to care?” Who’s he talking about? Israel? Or 21st century Americans?

Now, fortunately, God knew that we needed to be saved from our own out-of-control desires for more. That’s why Jesus became one of us. That’s why he lived perfectly. That’s why he sacrificed his life on the cross. That’s why he came back to life—to give you real life—life that never ends—life that is free from the exhausting chase after more. In Christ, you truly have all things. Through the adoption of baptism and the gift of faith you become a family member and friend of the Almighty God. He shares his riches with you, and His riches do go with you out of this world when nothing else does. He gives you identity. He defines you as His own child. You

no longer have to define yourself by what you buy and how new it is or how expensive it is. Instead of running after those things, you are free to run after Christ! Content with what you have and who you are, you can run after godliness and faith! Content with the identity God has given you, you can pursue love, endurance and gentleness. It is good and right for you to want more of these things, because they will actually fill you up! Pursue the way of Jesus, and you will find a peace that the world, with all its “bling,” has no ability to give. Let Christ break the cycle of more that controls your thinking. Enjoy the life that flows from Him, and you may just learn that contentment is right under your nose.

Take, for instance, the man who became envious of his friends because they had larger and more luxurious homes. So he listed his house with a real estate firm, planning to sell it and to purchase a more impressive home. Shortly afterward, as he was reading the classified section of the newspaper, he saw an ad for a house that seemed just right. He promptly called the realtor and said, "A house described in today's paper is exactly what I'm looking for. I would like to go through it as soon as possible!" The agent asked him several questions about it and then replied, "But sir, that's your house you're describing."

In God's great design, you may already have what you thought you wanted. Let him take off the “more goggles” and take a new look around at your life. What riches you have! What love you've been shown! What forgiveness you've been given! All of it given in hopes that you will be drawn to the Giver—that you will be overwhelmed by his generosity—that you will be awestruck by a God who pours out blessing after blessing on people who don't deserve it.

To be sure, contentment is not always easy to maintain. Paul calls the pursuit of contentment and righteousness—the pursuit of God's way of life—“the good fight of the faith.” And it is a fight. It's a spiritual struggle and a war of the will. We will sometimes lose the battle and surrender to the current of more. When that happens, don't hide it; don't deny it; return to the Lord, be honest in repentance, and be refreshed by God's forgiveness, bought and paid for by Jesus. Then, recharged and content in Christ, take up the good fight again.

*For God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day.
The Kingdom's ours forever!*